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## ON THE SYNONYMS עֵדָה AND קָהָל.

BY REV. PHILIP A. NORDELL, D. D..

New London, Conn.

A study of these words is important not merely because of their frequent occurrence and intimate relationship, but because of their reflecting the evolution of political and ecclesiastical institutions. This interest is greatly increased by the unusual difficulty experienced in drawing a well-defined line of demarcation between them. Both seem to designate popular gatherings, especially of the people of Israel. Like many other closely related synonyms, they are sometimes used in this general sense without any discernible effort on the part of the writer to discriminate between them.

The root **עֵדָה** (to make fast, fix, or determine), which gives **מוֹעֵד** (a fixed time or place, and hence a fixed or predetermined gathering), gives also **עֵדָה**, which is often taken to be an assembly or congregation gathered at some fixed time or place. But this sense, so fundamental and conspicuous in **מוֹעֵד** is far less apparent in **עֵדָה**. It may be said, indeed, that no well-defined instance of **עֵדָה** being used in this sense of **מוֹעֵד** exists in Hebrew literature. In **קָהָל** the radical meaning passes from the participial form of the verb **קָהָל** (a calling together or summoning), to a designation of the assembly so called or summoned. Etymologically it means the *convocata societas*, and corresponds to the *ἐκκλησία* called together by the Greek magistrates. Still a **קָהָל** is not always a convocation; it may designate a spontaneous and unpremeditated gathering, as in Num. xx. 4, 6; Ezra ii. 64. An **עֵדָה**, on the contrary, seems in many places to partake of the nature of a **קָהָל** in that it is formally summoned to the place of meeting, Ex. xxxv. 20; Lev. viii. 3; Num. i. 18, etc. The etymology, therefore, cannot be relied on in determining their meanings.

Nor is the result more satisfactory if we turn to writers who have attempted to state the difference between them. Perfect agreement is found among those only who, like Bevan in Smith's *Bib. Dict.*, s. v. "Congregation," dismiss them as practically equivalent. Other writers reach the most varied and contradictory

conclusions. Prof. Plumptre in the same work, s. v. "Synagogue," following the etymology, makes the predominant idea in **ערה** that of an appointed meeting, and in **קהל** of a meeting called together. Umbreit understands a **קהל** to be any general assembly, and an **ערה**, more precisely, a representative assembly, "*senatus, Rath der Aeltesten*" (*Die Sprueche Salomo's*, 5: 14). Delitzsch on the same passage controverts the opinion that these words point respectively to the civil and ecclesiastical aspects of the Hebrew commonwealth, but is inclined to think that **קהל** denotes the "Gesammtekklesia," and **ערה** the "Gesammtheit ihrer Rep-räsentanten." Köstlin, treating of the Church in Herzog's *Real-Encyclop.*, holds that an **ערה** is any general assembly, and that a **קהל** is a gathering for divine worship. Girdlestone, *Hebr. Synonyms*, p. 367, admits that it is not easy to distinguish between **קהל** and **ערה**, but thinks that "there is some reason for taking the first as generally referring to the *representative* gathering, while the second often signifies an informal massing of the people." Bedarshi, a much-prized Jewish writer on Hebrew synonyms, whose work dates from the thirteenth century, following the Talmud, decides empirically that a ruling **ערה**, i. e., a quorum for the transaction of business, must consist of not less than ten representative men; a **קהל**, on the contrary, is a promiscuous assembly. These are only a few of the definitions that might be cited.

We naturally turn to the Septuagint Version for light, but the help it offers is not so satisfactory as it might have been if the LXX. had observed some degree of uniformity in their renderings. In respect to **ערה**, however, there is little cause for complaint. In its 148 occurrences it has been translated by *συναγωγή* 130 times; in the remaining 18 it has been omitted, as pleonastic, eight times, Num. i. 58; xxvii. 20; xxxi. 12; Josh. ix. 18; xxii. 12, 18; 1 Kgs. viii. 5; in three instances, Job xvi. 7; Jer. vi. 8; Hos. vii. 12, the translators seem to have used a Hebrew text in which the word **ערה** was replaced by some other expression; twice, Num. iii. 7; xxxii. 4, **ערה** is rendered by *νιοὶ Ἰσραὴλ*; other renderings are *σκηνή*, Num. xvi. 9; *ἐπιστάσεις*, verse 40; *παρεμβολή*, verse 46; *οἶκους*, Job xvi. 34; *βοιλή*, Ps. i. 5, and *μαρτύρια*, Jer. xxx. 20. The last six, then, are the only real departures from practical uniformity, and these variations are easily justified. The LXX. therefore, treated **ערה** and *συναγωγή* as substantially equivalent. The same consistency does not appear in their renderings of **קהל**; for, while *ἐκκλησία* prevails, occurring in 76 out of 123 instances, *συναγωγή* is also given in not less than 37 places; *ὄχλος* occurs six times, *συνέδριον* twice, and *ἐκστάσεις* and *λαός* once each.<sup>1</sup> Whatever conclusion might be drawn from the almost uniform translation of **ערה** by *συναγωγή* is vitiated by the confusion in the renderings of **קהל**.

The English versions attempt to be consistent in respect to **ערה**, rendering

<sup>1</sup> For an analysis of these renderings as they occur in the various books, see Cremer, *Bibl. Theol. Woerterbuch*, s. v. *ἐκκλησία*.

it "congregation" when it refers to theocratic Israel, and "company" when it refers to Korah's conspiracy. The revised version corrects the few exceptions of the common version in all places but two, Ps. xxii. 16; Prov. v. 14, where both have "assembly." The renderings of קהל, on the contrary, are strangely arbitrary. Aside from the sixteen places where it is translated "company," the other renderings are about equally distributed between "assembly" and "congregation." With a single exception, Num. xxii. 4, the Revisers give "assembly" throughout Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Job, Joel, Micah; "congregation" throughout Kings, Chronicles, Ezra; "assembly" and "congregation" in Nehemiah, Psalms, Proverbs; "assembly" and "company" in Genesis, Jeremiah, Ezekiel. One might suspect that this confusion originated in the Revisers permitting themselves to be guided by the LXX. Not at all. The best scholarship of the nineteenth century is able to be independent in its arbitrariness.

What, then, is the distinction between these terms? Even a brief examination dispels the impression that they are used indiscriminately. Nor is it likely that the terms employed in such intimate relation to every movement of Israel's national life denote only the community in general, or a mere fortuitous concourse of its individual units. The more closely they are scrutinized, the more clearly it is seen that Hebrew writers not only distinguished between them, but that one at least, if not both, was used almost invariably with a unique and technical import. This is true of עדה. Is there no passage where it defines itself, or is defined for us? Such a definition occurs in Num. i. 2, "Take ye the sum of all the עדה of the children of Israel, by their families, by their fathers' houses, according to the number of the names, every male by their polls: from twenty years old and upward, all that are able to go forth to war in Israel." No incidental definition could be more explicit. Moses and Aaron are commanded to take the census of the עדה. They find (verse 46) that the עדה of Israel numbers 603,550 males of twenty years and upward. Another census of the עדה is taken at the close of the wanderings in the wilderness (Num. xxvi. 2), when it was found to consist of 601,730 men of twenty years old and upward. At the construction of the tabernacle a poll-tax of half a shekel was collected from "them that were numbered of the עדה," "from twenty years old and upward, for 603,550 men," Exod. xxxviii. 25, 26. When the spies brought up an evil report, and all the עדה in a riotous outbreak would have stoned Joshua and Caleb, the Lord said "How long shall I bear with this evil עדה, which murmur against me? . . . As I live, saith the Lord, surely as ye have spoken in mine ears, so will I do unto you: your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness, and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward. I, the Lord, have spoken, surely this will I do unto this evil עדה," Num. xiv. 27-35. Here, then, was the central conception of the עדה ישראל. It was the national body politic,

the *πολιται*, composed of all the circumcised males above a certain age.<sup>1</sup> It had a fixed and well-determined constituency, that fluctuated only with the ebb and flow of the population from age to age. This fact reveals the etymological propriety of this technical term, and explains the fact already noted that it never occurs in the sense of an assembly gathered at a *fixed* time or place.<sup>2</sup> Right here, too, is the fundamental error in all the definitions cited above, in that they make the idea of an *actual assembly* the essential thing in the *ערה*, whereas it is altogether incidental.

Practically and primarily, then, the *ערה* stood for the nation in the strength and maturity of its manhood. Representing the nation in its wholeness, it was often used where, strictly speaking, all the people were included; e. g., "All the *ערה* of the children of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin," Exod. xvi. 1; cf. xvii. 1; Num. xxii. 1, 22, etc. When the people suffered from hunger or thirst, the *ערה* voiced the general discontent, Exod. xvi. 2; Num. xx. 2-11. It is the *ערה*, representing all the people, that kept the passover, Exod. xii. 3-47; were commanded to be holy, Lev. xix. 2; sinned through ignorance, Lev. iv. 13, 14; or mourned for Aaron, Num. xx. 29.

To convene so large a body of men in a judicial or deliberative assembly, or even to communicate directly to them the divine injunctions given to Moses, was of course out of question. The political organization of the people, which had developed itself in patriarchal fashion even before the establishment of the theocracy, found its natural representatives in the heads of families and tribes, the *זקנים* and the *נשיאים*. These coming together formed a smaller body which represented the whole *ערה*, as the *ערה* represented the whole nation. In the majority of instances where the word occurs, it seems to apply to this smaller body of elders and princes, but always with a tendency, almost irresistible, to glide into the larger technical sense of the entire political constituency, in which it so sinks its own individuality that in many instances it is impossible to distinguish between them. How large this representative body was there is no means of knowing, but it was of sufficient magnitude to have necessitated the selection of a still smaller body of seventy men to assist in the transaction of public business.

*The ערת ישראל was the technical name of the whole body of circumcised males above twenty years of age, who either represented all the people, or were represented by the heads of their respective families.*

<sup>1</sup> From the description of the *קהל* in Josh. viii., 35, which included "the women, the little ones, and the strangers that walked among them," Girdlestone draws the strange conclusion that the *קהל* "properly meant all the male adults of the nation," p. 363,—a proceeding not less remarkable than when, on the same page, he illustrates the meaning of *קהל* by passages that employ *ערה*.

<sup>2</sup> Gousset's definition of the *ערה* (*Lex. ling. hebr.*, 1743), as a *conventus hominum tempore indicto et locum indictum* is therefore not only wrong, but unsupported by a single fact.

Running through all the occurrences of קהל we perceive an explicit or implied reference to the fundamental idea—that of a gathering summoned, called, selected, or elected for a specific purpose or end. Sometimes it was gathered in view of a secular or social emergency (Num. xx. 10; Ezra x. 8), but far more frequently it designated an assembly of Israel gathered for strictly religious or theocratic purposes. Even in Deut. xxiii. 2–8, which seems to be the foundation of Vitringa's definition of the קהל<sup>1</sup>, it does not point to a close political corporation, but to a people called, elected from the surrounding nations to be holy unto the Lord; and therefore it was commanded to keep itself holy by the expulsion of illegitimate contaminations whether indigenous or foreign. In other words, it was a מקרא קדש. As such, while it covered the same constituency as the עדה (for which it is very rarely interchanged), it contemplates this constituency from a widely different point of view; e. g., Num. xx. 8, where Moses and Aaron were commanded to gather the עדה, and they summoned the קהל. Plainly this term would be used to designate the assembled representatives of the עדה, who, either during the hagiocracy (Lev. iv. 13), or during the monarchy (1 Chron. xiii. 2, 4; xxviii. 8, 29; i. 10, 20; 2 Chron. i. 35; xxiii. 3), were formally summoned to act respecting the secular or religious interests of the people. From this it easily passed into the designation of a political meeting (1 Kgs. xii. 3), or even an army (Judg. xx. 2; 1 Sam. xvii. 47; Jer. l. 9). As a rule, however, the קהל denoted either that part of the עדה of whatever rank which responded to the summons for a meeting at the אהל מועד, and such meetings were usually for religious purposes; or a solemn assembly of all the people, such as that gathered before Sinai to receive the law “in the day of the קהל,” before the courts of the temple at its dedication and at Hezekiah's passover, or before the Lord in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah.

*The קהל was, in general, the name of any theocratic gathering of the people, and was composed of those who freely responded to a summons proceeding directly or indirectly from Israel's divine king.*

Apply the discriminations here made, and the correctness of the above conclusions will appear still more clearly. It was the עדה that murmured against Moses and Aaron, and said (Exod. xvi. 2, 3), “Ye have brought us forth into this wilderness to kill this whole קהל with hunger.” The latter term, not the

<sup>1</sup> After a prolonged examination he concludes: “Vocabulum קהל valet significatu magis restricto et determinato quam vocabulum עדה. Notat enim proprie universam alicujus populi multitudinem, vinctis societatis unitam et rempublicam sive civitatem quondam constituentem, cum vocabulum עדה ex indole et vi significationis suae tantum dicat quemcunque hominum coetum et conventum, sive minorem sive majorem: imprimis tamen conductum statumque, non integri populi (etsi adeo latae sit significationis, ut et illi applicatur, ceu in textu modo adducto vidimus) sed certorum quorundam de populo virorum, quales sunt conventus et consilia magistratum.”—*De synagoga vetere*, p. 80. From this it appears that he laboriously misses the meaning of עדה, as well as of קהל,

former, contemplated the people as brought forth, summoned, out of Egypt. The same distinction applies in Num. xvi. 3. In case the whole עדה of Israel sinned and the thing was hid from the eyes of the קהל, then, when the sin became known, the קהל was directed to take a bullock for a sin-offering, upon which the elders of the עדה were commanded to lay their hands, Lev. iv. 13-15. The עדה is here the whole body politic, the קהל its summoned representatives, further defined as the זקני העדה; for it is always the עדה and never the קהל that develops along genealogical lines. In 2 Chron. v. 2, 3, it is told that Solomon assembled "all the men of Israel" of all ranks at Jerusalem. In the sixth verse this assembly is rightly called the עדה of Israel. But in vi. 3, where it is said that Solomon "turned his face and blessed all the קהל of Israel,"—the same assembly,—the predominant thought is that of a congregation assembled for religious worship. With this view of קהל a deeper meaning is seen in the patriarchal blessings (Gen. xxviii. 3; xxxv. 11), than is conveyed by the words "multitude" or "company." A קהל עמים, or a קהל גוים, designated peoples or nations specially called, and, in so far as called, chosen out of the surrounding heathenism; it pointed not so much to a *convocation* as to an *evocation* of nations.

In the light of these definitions many facts otherwise inexplicable become easily understood. Since the constituency of the עדה depended on conditions beyond the control of the individual, it follows that we never read of a great or little עדה. Its magnitude was not contingent on the pleasure of those who composed it. Whether many or few, they represented the whole עדה, and transacted its business. Hence the pertinency of the Talmudic decision given by Bedarshi, that no ruling עדה should consist of less than ten elders. The קהל, on the contrary, had a constituency measured simply by personal willingness to respond to the summons. Because it was liable to be large or small we read of a קהל רב, Ps. xxii. 11, a קהל גדול, 1 Kgs. viii. 65, and even a קהל גדול מאד, 2 Chron. vii. 8. A man was born into the עדה; he went to the קהל or stayed away as it pleased him. This explains why no census was taken of the latter, but only of the former. In view of this distinction it is clear also why no instance occurs where women and children are spoken of as included in the עדה, and why their presence is repeatedly mentioned (Ezra x. 1; Neh. viii. 2; Jer. xliv. 15), or implied (Deut. v. 22) in the popular קהל. Since the former was the technical name for the Hebrew body politic, it would manifestly be inappropriate to use it of a non-Israelitish body, and it is never so used; the reverse is true of קהל, e. g., throughout Ezekiel. Because of the rebellious murmurings, sentence of death was pronounced on the עדה, as we have seen, but not on the קהל. The one naturally exercised political, judicial, and administrative functions; the other just as naturally did not. We meet the expression כל-קהל עדת בני ישראל, Num. xiv. 5; Exod. xii. 6; but never כל-עדת קהל, an impossible thought to a Hebrew writer to whom the former phrase was not a mere rhetorical amplification, but a

climax of social magnitudes. It is clear, finally, how such a writer might discriminate sharply between these terms, and yet, from different points of view, apply them to the same constituency.

Exceedingly interesting it is to follow these words in their historical evolution,—the עֵרָה into the later synagogue and sanhedrim, and the קָהָל into the New Testament *ἐκκλησία*; to trace their bearing on the fundamental conception of modern national churches; and to notice their misinterpretation and misuse in recent rationalistic criticism. The length of this paper, longer already than was anticipated, forbids anything beyond the mentioning of these lines of investigation.